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COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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March 1, 2000

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Mr. William E. Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
The Portals, 445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

SUBJECT: **UNIVERSAL SERVICES SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES
(NO. 96-45)**

Dear Chairman Kennard:

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The Council of Chief State School Officers urges the Federal Communications Commission to allocate a universal services collection level which will allow adequate assistance for all of the eligible applicants for year three of the School and Library Universal Services Discount Program. As you know, this year schools and libraries are requesting \$4.72 billion, which is far above the funding cap set by the Commission last Spring for year two. The completion and submission of 36,000 applications filed within the application filing window, which closed January 19, 2000, obviously attests to the tremendous need for affordable telecommunications services for the nation's schools and libraries.

Based on the summary report submitted to the Commission by the Schools and Libraries Division (SLD/USAC) last month, approximately 60 percent of the requests for discounts have been submitted on behalf of some of the nation's neediest schools and libraries, i.e., those qualifying for program discounts of 80 to 90 percent. These schools and libraries represent populations where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program. However, if the existing rules of funding priority and annual cap on spending of \$2.25 billion remain in effect for year three, not even schools and libraries that qualify for a 90 percent discount would be guaranteed support for internal connections. High-cost rural schools that qualify for internal wiring discounts in the 70-90 range would be particularly affected. We must all keep in

mind that if only 63 percent of instructional classrooms have Internet access, the goal of ensuring equal access to critical electronic information services is still far from being a reality.

Finally, as we noted in our comments in our letter to the Commission on January 7, 2000, we are disappointed that the Commission has not made a decision on the disposition of unused funding for previous funding years. We are also disappointed that the Commission chose to apply one-quarter of the estimated unused balance of contributions collected for year one to reduce the collection requirement for the Schools and Libraries program in the first quarter of 2000. As the true need for this program is revealed in the \$4.72 billion request for this year, we urge the Commission to allow unused program funds from earlier years to be rolled over to support eligible applications in subsequent years. In light of the current level of demand and the importance of networking individual classrooms, we urge the Commission to make sufficient funds available to the eligible services truly "universal."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. M. Ambach", written over a horizontal line.

Gordon M. Ambach
Executive Director

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